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BAN ON WOMEN USING SMART PHONES IN RAJ DIST WITHDRAWN

Village elders in Rajasthan's Jalore district have withdrawn the ban imposed on women using smartphones after facing strident opposition

BAN WAS MISUNDERSTOOD, SAY VILLAGERS

A meeting of the panchas (village elders) was convened on Thursday in Gazipur village, where they unanimously decided to withdraw the ban, saying the decision kept children in mind, but it was "misunderstood". Earlier, on December 21, the panchas had banned daughters and daughters-in-law of 15 villages from using smartphones, starting Jan 26

'BAN TO CURB CHILDREN HOOKED TO PHONES'

- A member of the panchas, Natharam Chaudhary, explained that the decision of December 21 was taken after numerous complaints from women that their children used to borrow their phones after school
- Chaudhary said kids spend the entire day watching videos, which has adverse effects on their brain; the ban was taken to curb this habit

Dec 21

WAS WHEN THE VILLAGE PANCHAS ANNOUNCED THE FIAT

CHENNAI ▪ MADURAI ▪ VIJAYAWADA ▪ BENGALURU ▪ KOCHI ▪ HYDERABAD ▪ VISAKHAPATNAM ▪ COIMBATORE ▪ KOZHIKODE ▪ THIRUVANANTHAPURAM ▪ BELAGAVI ▪ BHUBANESWAR ▪ SHIVAMOGGA ▪ MANGALURU ▪ TIRUPATI ▪ TIRUCHY ▪ TIRUNELVELI ▪ SAMBALPUR ▪ HUBBALLI ▪ DHARMAPURI ▪ KOTTAYAM ▪ KANNUR ▪ VILLUPURAM ▪ KOLLAM ▪ TADEPALLIGUDEM ▪ NAGAPATTINAM ▪ THRISSUR ▪ KALABURAGI

The container truck and the sleeper coach engulfed in flames following the collision near Chitradurga on Thursday morning | PTI

6 CHARRED TO DEATH AS TRUCK RAMS SLEEPER COACH ON NH-48

G SUBHASH CHANDRA
@ Chitradurga

SIX people were charred to death after a truck collided with a sleeper bus, resulting in a fire which engulfed both vehicles, on the Pune-Bengaluru National Highway 48 near Gorlathu Cross, in Hiriyur taluk of Chitradurga district, around 2am Thursday. The container truck jumped the divider and rammed the private bus, which was heading from Bengaluru to Gokarna via Shivamogga.

Five passengers of the bus and the truck driver, identified as Kuldeep Yadav from Haryana, perished in the blaze, while 28 passengers who suffered injuries are under treatment at government hospitals in Hiriyur, Sira, Tumakuru and a private hospital in Sira. The condition of three patients is said to be serious and they were shifted to Bengaluru for treatment.

The deceased were identified as Bindu (8L); Bindu's daughter Greya (5 yrs, no seat); Manasa (2L); Navya (11L) and Rashmi Mahale (11U).

Eyewitnesses said the non-AC sleeper coach was near Javangondanahalli when the container truck coming from the opposite direction crossed the divider and hit the bus. Both the container truck and bus caught fire due to the collusion.

Police and fire brigade personnel rushed to the spot but the vehicles were burnt before they could reach the spot. The charred bodies were lifted out of the bus with the help of SDRF and fire brigade. **P6**

PM ANNOUNCES ₹2L, CM ₹5L FOR VICTIMS' KIN

Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Chief Minister Siddaramaiah condoled the loss of lives in the accident. While the PM announced an ex-gratia of Rs 2 lakh to the next of the kin of the deceased and Rs 50,000 for the injured, the CM announced Rs 5 lakh for the victims' families and Rs 50,000 for the injured | **P6**

Political reset in B'desh as Tarique back in Dhaka

Ex-PM Khaleda Zia's son calls for building an inclusive Bangladesh

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
@ New Delhi

AMID unrest and chaos in Bangladesh following the murder of prominent youth leader Sharif Osman Hadi, former prime minister Khaleda Zia's son Tarique Rahman returned to Dhaka on Thursday after 17 years in self-exile.

The dramatic return of Rahman, the acting chairman of Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), is expected to change the dynamics of the February 12 elections with a possible contest between the BNP and its former ally Jamaat-e-Islami.

With the Muhammad Yunus-led interim government barring ousted PM Sheikh Hasina's Awami League from contesting elections, BNP is said to be the front-runner.

Hasina had banned the Jamaat but Yunus lifted it due to pressure from radicals. The Jamaat reportedly enjoys the support of student outfits that led the protests to remove Hasina from power.

Shortly after landing at the Hazrat Shahjalal International airport, Rahman stood barefoot on Bangladeshi soil in a symbolic gesture to mark his return to the country's politics.

Articulating his plans to build an "inclusive Bangladesh", he said: "We want to build a safe Bangladesh... no matter who a woman, man, or child is, they should be able to leave their homes safely and return safely."

Rahman, 60, had been living in London since 2008. He was leading the BNP since 2018 following Zia's ill health.

Urging people to maintain peace and stability, he said: "We have people from the hills and the plains in this country Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists and Christians."

Invoking Martin Luther King's famous speech "I have a dream", he said, "I have a plan," adding he will take everyone on board to rebuild the nation.

Notably, during his address, Rahman didn't make any direct reference to India though he mentioned the birth of Bangladesh in 1971.

India liberated Bangladesh (then East Pakistan) from Pakistan's brutal rule in 1971. **P11**

BNP's acting chairman Tarique Rahman waves to his supporters in Dhaka | PTI

> **This country belongs to Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists and Christians** — Tarique Rahman

ANOTHER HINDU MAN LYNCHED IN B'DESH

Days after factory worker Dipu Chandra Das was lynched by a mob, another Hindu man identified as Amrit Mondal was beaten to death. Local reports quoting police claimed he was an extortionist

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EXPRESS READ

Vendor dies in cylinder blast near Mys palace

Mysuru: A helium cylinder used by a balloon vendor exploded near the Jayamarthanda Gate of Mysuru Palace on Thursday night, killing the vendor and injuring four others. The incident occurred around 8.30pm, while thousands had gathered at the premises to enjoy the flower show | **P5**

Nat'l meet of chief secys begins today

New Delhi: Prime Minister Narendra Modi will chair a three-day national conference of chief secretaries in New Delhi from Friday to Sunday, bringing together senior bureaucrats from states, Union Territories and key Union ministries for discussions on governance and policy implementation | **P9**

WITH THIS ISSUE
CITY'S BEST WEEKEND GUIDE INDULGE 46 PAGES, INCLUDING 32 OF INDULGE (TABLOID)

UNNAO RAPE

Plea in SC against Sengar

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
@ New Delhi

A Supreme Court petition has challenged the Delhi High Court's decision to suspend expelled BJP leader Kuldeep Singh Sengar's life sentence in the 2017 Unnao rape case.

Advocates Anjale Patel and Pooja Shilpkar argued that the HC erred by ignoring the trial court's observation that Sengar should remain imprisoned for life. They contended that the bail disregards his "serious criminal antecedents" and involvement in heinous crimes, including orchestrating the victim's father's murder while in custody.

Kuldeep Sengar

On December 23, the high court had suspended Sengar's sentence, imposed in December 2019, noting that he had served over seven years.

However, Sengar will remain in jail as he is serving 10 years for the custodial death case in the same matter.

Top Maoist Uikey, with over ₹1 crore bounty, eliminated

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
@ Bhubaneswar

IN a decisive blow to Maoist insurgency, security forces eliminated four persons, including top CPI (Maoist) central committee member Ganesh Uikey, during an encounter in Kandhamal district's Chakapada on Thursday. The 69-year-old commander, carrying a bounty of ₹1.1 crore, headed Maoist operations across Odisha.

Ganesh Uikey

The operation in Rambha forest range near the Kandhamal-Ganjam border involved 20 Special Operations Group (SOG) units, two CRPF battalions, and BSF personnel. "Multiple exchanges of fire occurred early morning. Four Maoists were neutralised, including two women, all in uniform," said ADG (Anti-Naxal Operations) Sanjeeb Panda.

Uikey, originally from Telangana's Nalgonda district, was among India's most wanted insurgents, operating under aliases including Rupa, Rajesh Tiwari, and Chamru. He carried combined rewards of ₹2 crore across four states and orchestrated deadly attacks across eastern and central regions of the country.

The other slain cadres carried rewards of ₹1.65 lakh each. Security forces recovered two INSAS rifles and one .303 rifle from the site.

This follows Wednesday's encounter in Gumma forest that killed two more Maoists, bringing the 24-hour toll to six.

Union Home Minister Amit Shah termed it "a significant milestone towards Naxal-free Bharat," reaffirming the government's commitment to eliminate Naxalism by March 31, 2026.

Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi praised the forces' dedication, saying, "Odisha's development and public safety remain our top priorities."

Pentagon report on India axis malicious: China

MILITARY BASE IN PAK?

Defence ministry spokesman Zhang Xiaogang, too, denounced the Pentagon report, which also flagged enhanced ties between China and Pakistan, adding Beijing "likely also considered" setting up a base in Pakistan

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
@ New Delhi

CHINA on Thursday denounced a Pentagon report that accused Beijing of leveraging reduced tensions along the Line of Actual Control (LAC) with India to stabilise bilateral relations and prevent a deeper strategic alignment between New Delhi and Washington.

"The Pentagon's report distorts China's defence policy, sows discord, and aims at finding a pretext for the US to maintain its military supremacy," foreign Ministry spokesperson Lin Jian caustically told the media in Beijing, when asked about the US Department of Defense's annual report to Congress on China.

Lin said Beijing views and handles its relations with New Delhi from a strategic height and a long-term perspective. "We stand ready to strengthen communication, enhance mutual trust, promote cooperation, and properly handle differences with India, and advance a sound and stable bilateral relationship," Lin said.

As for the LAC, Lin said, "the boundary question is a matter between China and India, and the current border situation between the two countries is generally stable with smooth communication channels."

The US releases such reports year after year, grossly interfering in China's internal affairs, Chinese Defence Ministry spokesman Zhang Xiaogang told a separate media briefing. He described it as a maliciously misinterpreted report that is full of erroneous understanding.

MERRY CHRISTMAS

Prime Minister Narendra Modi during Christmas service at the Cathedral Church of the Redemption in New Delhi on Thursday. "May Christmas bring renewed hope, warmth and a shared commitment to kindness," Modi later posted on X | PTI

GBA sets ball rolling for GIS-based master plan

MOHAMMED YACOOB @ Bengaluru

THE Greater Bengaluru Authority (GBA) has invited global tenders from consulting agencies for preparation of a Geographic Information System (GIS)-based master plan for the Greater Bengaluru Local Planning Area.

Speaking to TNIE, the GBA Chief Commissioner M Maheshwar Rao said the plan will include defining what a commercial area is, what residential areas are, and others.

A senior official in the GBA said that the plan will include acquiring land on the outskirts for some development projects and development of roads, urban forest, and water supply, as the city population is growing exponentially.

Tender eligibility criteria, scope of work, terms and conditions are available from the website of the e-procurement department (http//www/kppp.karnataka.gov.in)

The pre-bid meeting will be held on January 9, 2026, at the office of the Chief Town Planner, Greater Bengaluru Authority, NR Square in Hudson Circle, and the last date for the submission of the bid is January 10.

V Ravichandar, Civic Evangelist, said the GBA is the local planning authority and they are the right people to initiate the master plan. "Under the 74th Amendment, the individual corporation also has to submit their own plans, which become part of the overall plan, which gets meshed with the water supply, electricity, and other agencies that are part of the GBA. **P2**

Lantana shrubs being processed at Bandipur Tiger Reserve | UDAYASHANKAR S

BRT initiative: Turning invasive lantana into fuel

KARTHIK KK @ Mysuru

OFFICIALS of the Bandipur Tiger Reserve (BTR) have begun converting lantana into fuel briquettes, transforming an environmental menace into a potential source of clean energy and livelihood for communities living on the fringes of the sanctuary.

Lantana, the invasive shrub, disrupts the native forest ecosystem by wiping out indigenous grass species and suppressing tree regeneration, ultimately reducing the capacity of forests to support wildlife. The survival of forests depends on the eradication of lantana to allow native vegetation and food chains to recover.

Even after their removal, the invasive shrubs regenerate if left untreated. To prevent this, BTR has adopted a process of pulverising the woody biomass and converting it into high-density fuel briquettes. The briquettes can be used as an alternative to conventional firewood, offering a renewable energy source.

"Lantana that is merely cleared has a high chance of regeneration. By pulverising and briquetting it, we are ensuring complete utilisation of the invasive weed," said Prabhakaran, field director, BTR.

"This is done on a trial basis. We are assessing its economic viability. If it works, eco-development committees and forest-fringe communities will be involved in the initiative," he said.

Lantana shrubs removed from around 100 acres of forest in the Bandipur and GS Betta ranges have been processed. NGOs, CSR-supported agencies and local partners have cleared lantana from nearly 35 acres of the 100-acre forest. **P7**

KASHMIRI SHAWL VENDOR ASSAULTED IN UTTARAKHAND

A Kashmiri shawl vendor was allegedly assaulted, robbed, and threatened by a group of Bajrang Dal activists in Uttarakhand, the J&K Students Association said | **P10**